

Recognizing Aggressive Driving, Road Rage

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While many cities encourage workers to use buses, trains and HOV lanes, millions of Americans still commute along crowded city streets. This increased traffic, coupled with commuters' desires to reach their destinations sooner, rather than later, has made many Americans more aggressive behind the wheel. In some cases, drivers have resorted to road rage.

I'm writing this article and the sidebar that follows because the leading cause of death among our Sailors and Marines is traffic crashes—not in combat with

the enemy. Understanding what you can do to reduce your own aggressiveness on the road or to avoid someone else with the same mindset may prevent you and/or the other driver from becoming a statistic.

Three categories of problematic motorists typically exist: assertive drivers, aggressive drivers, and those who let their emotions take over and exhibit road rage. Although not formally defined, an assertive driver would be one who practices defensive driving but is willing to bend the rules to go with the flow of traffic. Conversely, there are many definitions of an



aggressive driver. One of the most stringent definitions is “an angry motorist, attempting to intentionally injure or kill another driver because of a traffic dispute” [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety]. Road rage, on the other hand, is a criminal offense.

According to drivers.com, road rage occurs when a traffic incident escalates into a far more serious situation. For example, a person may become so angry over an aggressive-driving incident that he or she overreacts and retaliates with some type of violence. These acts may range from physical confrontation to assault with a motor vehicle or possibly a weapon.

Are You an Aggressive Driver?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration defines aggressive driving as “the operation of a motor vehicle in a manner which endangers or is likely to endanger persons or property.” Have you ever found yourself doing any of these things?

- Running traffic lights or stop signs.
- Driving through a crosswalk occupied by a pedestrian.
- Knocking over traffic signs.
- Cutting off drivers when passing or not allowing someone to pass safely. Passing in no-passing zones.
- Tailgating.
- Driving across highway dividers.
- Not yielding at intersections to the driver on the right when both arrived simultaneously. Not yielding when making left turns. Not stopping or yielding according to signs. Incorrectly yielding when entering traffic.
- Not taking care to avoid hitting pedestrians.
- Turning incorrectly at intersections. Making unsafe U-turns. Not signaling before slowing for a turn.



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- Not stopping at railroad tracks when directed to do so.
- Passing stopped school buses when warning lights are flashing.
- Breaking the speed limit. Driving too slowly when unwarranted. Exceeding 20-mph speed limit in school zones when kids are present. Speeding in marked construction areas.
- Illegally parking in roadways. Illegally parking on bridges, in crosswalks, close to fire hydrants and driveways.
- Opening vehicle doors unsafely and leaving them open too long.
- Throwing bottles, nails, wire, and other dangerous items from vehicles.
- Driving with one or more wheels off the road.

Get Out of My Way!

Most aggressive drivers have a “get out of my way” mindset when behind the wheel. They feel a need to punish other drivers for impeding their progress. The traffic we all encounter may make you feel claustrophobic, and the need to break free from that environment may lead to aggressive-driving habits.

Also, some people often view their vehicles as an extension of their home. We set standards for ourselves that may be fine in the privacy of our homes but would not be acceptable in public. The car straddles the boundary between private space and public domain, so many drivers behave much differently than they would in a public place. Do you ever do any of the following?

- Tailgate to pressure a driver to go faster or get out of the way, or flash your lights to signal a person to move to another lane.
- Make obscene gestures.
- Change lanes without signaling, blast the horn, or frequently change lanes by weaving back and forth.
- Race to beat a yellow light that's about to turn red.
- Travel in the passing or left lane at a slower speed, making it impossible for others to pass.
- Drive with the high beams on behind another vehicle or toward oncoming traffic.
- Cut off people, slow down after passing someone, or fail to turn right in the right-hand turn lane.

If you said yes to any of these items, it may mean you're letting your daily commute get the best of you. **S**

The author was assigned to VFA-87 when he wrote this story and the sidebar that follows.